MS. MONTANA: Can you hear me all right? Hello, my name is Deborah Montana. I am a resident of Riverside, California. And I am a member of Physicians for Social Responsibility.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement regarding the Yucca Mountain waste repository proposes to bury upwards of 86,000 metric tons of highly irradiated nuclear fuel. Conservatively a minimum of 30 billion curies of radioactivity. If sited, Yucca Mountain, less than a half day's drive from my home, will become one of the most toxic places on the planet.

1 The Department of Energy has not disclosed the route by which this waste would be transported from the West Coast to Nevada, but one can presume that the state highways, I-15 and I-40, as well as the Union Pacific, and Santa Fe track lines that traverse San Bernardino and Riverside counties. This is troubling.

2 This is by far the largest nuclear waste project ever conceived, yet the plans contain too many unknowns for it to be fully safe.

We do not know how this waste will react when shipped, nor are we fully confident that the containers, which have yet to be tested in a real-life situation, can stand up in an accident.

3... Upwards of 2,000 casks will be traveling via truck and rail through the Inland empire, over 50,000 shipments nationwide. An accident would devastate the people and the environment. Are we so absolutely confident that no traffic accident will take place?

I sincerely doubt that there will be a 100 percent driving record. Just earlier this month a major highway in the San Francisco area was closed for hours due to the mere suspicion that radioactive waste spilled on the roadway. In 1997 I-5 in Orange County was closed for more than eight hours when a minute amount of relatively benign radioactive waste leaked from an accident.

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From a public health perspective, such a plan of transport of highly dangerous waste through the nation, and on our highways, through densely populated areas, places at risk many millions of individuals that would not otherwise be placed in harm's way.

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The Draft Environmental Impact Statement before us today does not acknowledge the uniquely lethal nature of the waste and fails to provide sufficient information on the unique radiological characteristics of highly irradiated nuclear fuel. Information on the total activities in curies, and the surface dose rates in rems per hour of the assemblies of irradiated fuel is essential for the assessment of risks posed by the transportation and burial of radioactive waste, yet DOE does not provide such data.

According to the State of Nevada, a typical assembly from a pressurized water reactor will contain, even after 26 years of cooling, 31,000 curies of cesium-137 and 21,000 curies of strontium-90, and is a powerful source of penetrating gamma and neutron radiation.

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If such an accident takes place in our community, it would be as if a small neutron bomb were exploded in our midst. Thousands of rems would bombard those closest to an accident. Ten minutes of exposure would be enough to deliver a speedy but painful death. The brain cells of those exposed would swell and enlarge, producing encephalopathic symptoms. The victim would undergo confusion, delirium, stupor, psychosis, loss of muscle control, intense fever and assuredly death.

One unshielded assembly would have enough radiation to give a person standing next to it a dose of at least 100 rem per minute. A few minutes of exposure would give an individual acute radiation sickness. Those exposed would have Hiroshima-like symptoms -- hair

loss, skin sloughing off in ulcerous gouges in the body, vomiting, diarrhea. The count of red and white blood cells would tumble, and the victim would most likely die of infection or massive internal hemorrhaging. ...3

Lower doses of radiation are now known to cause cardiovascular and digestive diseases and abnormalities in the immune system. After only two minutes of exposure to an unshielded assembly, cancer risk would roughly double, and symptoms of radiation sickness would probably appear. On the cellular level, radiation shoots holes through the body's DNA, the very mechanism of forming cancer. Leukemia and other blood cancers may arise in five years after exposure. Cancers may arrive anywhere from 12 to 60 years later. Tumorous cancers, genetic diseases, and congenital abnormalities will also visit future generations of those exposed to ionizing radioactivity.

In drafting a plan to deal with this, I encourage the DOE to form a new methodology and a new method for dealing with such waste. Safety must be its chief concern. The DOE, which is charged with promoting nuclear power, may need to recuse itself from the disposal process. 5

The department must release all radiation 6

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health studies heretofore classified as secret so that good science can replace expedient science, to establish epidemiological studies for those nuclear workers not yet studied. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE.]